

# Health Funds That Were Held Back

## Washington

During the past year, the administration failed to spend nearly \$1.1 billion in funds that Congress had intended for major health programs, according to figures obtained by the House Commerce Committee.

The total withheld was more than one-fifth of the roughly \$4.7 billion allotted to the Health Services and Mental Health Administration, and the National Institutes of Health, the two largest health-related agencies of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare.

The discrepancy between the funds available for spending and the funds actually spent was found in a mass of data sent to the Congress by the department.

This led to an exchange of letters between the Commerce committee chairman, Representative Harley O. Staggers (Dem - W. Va.), and Caspar W. Weinberger, secretary of Health, Education and Welfare.

"I am dismayed that you have felt it appropriate to impound the \$1 billion that your letter describes," said Staggers. "I am not convinced that this is legal, necessary, or in the best interests of the people of our nation."

He asked the secretary to justify, program by program, the failure to spend money allocated under a continuing congressional resolution by which the department's spending was authorized during the 1973 fiscal year.

The funds authorized by the resolution were, in effect, appropriations. They were handled by congress-

sional resolution because the President vetoed the health appropriation bill.

In a letter to Staggers, Weinberger defended the withholding of the funds as legal, but a spokesman for the Commerce committee said there has not yet been a reply to the request for a program by program analysis.

A detailed breakdown of the withheld funds showed that even some of the programs given special public emphasis by the President were affected. The National Cancer Institute, for example, left \$58,859,000 unspent in a total budget authority of \$492,205,000.

The National Heart and Lung Institute left a total of \$44,217,000 unspent from its permissible spending level

of \$300 million under the continuing resolution.

Most severely hit were federal mental health programs. Although \$743,723,000 was appropriated, \$199,209,000 was left unspent.

In his letter to Weinberger, Staggers said that the programs in question were created to meet specific needs of the population, such as protection from disease, the needs for health manpower, biomedical research and improved health services of many kinds.

"Unless these needs in fact do not exist, or have been met, or are being met by alternative superior programs, then these impoundments must be considered a sad failure of our government's commitment to serve its people," the letter said.

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